



# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING LOVE QUILTS

ACESCO Foundation, Colombia

**WINNER – Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Love Quilts initiative, launched in 2009, emerged as a strategy to provide safe spaces and strengthen the participation capability and self-development of women in the municipality of Malambo, Colombia. Through the creation of an enabling space to sew together the so-called “Love Quilts,” women gather to discuss topics related to their rights as full-fledged citizens, the importance of their participation in family decisions and in community processes, from an inclusive and collective female perspective.

## Problem

In the municipality of Malambo, Colombia, a high percentage of women have low education levels, poor self-esteem, lack of knowledge of their human rights, subjugation to marital relations of submission and domination, restrictions to freedom of speech, domestic abuse, and unwanted pregnancies, resulting from a predominantly patriarchal culture. In addition to socio-economic conditions that limit the participation of women as rights owners and citizens of their communities, local municipal development policies often exclude the interests and needs of women.

## Approach of the Initiative

The “Love Quilts” initiative invites women to gather in venues close to their homes, such as a neighbor’s home or the neighborhood’s community center, to sew artisanal quilts or blankets as a group; but with the underlying objective of holding group discussions of readings on sexual and reproductive health, family life, citizen participation, or gender equality.

In order to achieve adequate reading skills to discuss the readings, a group of 10 women are trained to lead each “Love Quilts” group. These female leaders are provided with the methodology and materials for the production of each quilt, and invite an average of 20 women to join each group. Acesco Foundation teams monitor each group, guaranteeing adequate implementation of the methodology and achieving a cascading effect in the training. Once the production of a quilt is completed, the group of women decides collectively whether to donate or raffle the quilt. Proceeds are invested to resolve problems faced by group members or by the community as a whole. The cascade training strategy makes it possible to strengthen the empowerment and participation of poor, illiterate women, and enables them to develop critical communication and community leadership skills.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Patriarchal norms limit women’s access to decision-making spaces: This challenge was

Acesco Foundation embodies the commitment to social responsibility of Acesco, a company that has been manufacturing and marketing steel products for more than 50 years. The work of the foundation focuses on the strengthening of production chains, providing formal and non-formal education to children and adults, and supporting municipal development, mainly in the Atlántico and Caldas Departments in Colombia.



[www.fundacionacesco.org](http://www.fundacionacesco.org)





## Observations of evaluators and collaborating agencies

"Love Quilts offers an innovative methodology for social and community work because it has managed to bring everyday life into such complex issues as community and political participation of women in Colombia in a clear and accessible language to women with different education levels."

"The Love Quilts program has served as a referent to other organizations such as the Development Program for Peace of the Magdalena Center, which have expressed the relevance of this methodology for application not only in the Malambo municipality, but also in other municipalities and regions of Colombia."

overcome through the group sewing task that generates a climate of relaxation and trust, and allowed women to feel free to express themselves and to exchange ideas, feelings, and experiences.

- **Lack of professionals to coordinate each "Love Quilts" group:** Women leaders were selected from each zonal nucleus belonging to the United for Malambo Community Network, and received training to lead the "Love Quilts" group sessions in the absence of the professionals leading the project.

- **Low education levels of participating women:** Simple reading guides were designed to address the different topics of group discussions, and generated interest among many participants to reenter or complete their formal academic training.

- **Difficulty in breaking the domination and submission of women in their homes:** Women raffle or sell finished quilts, generating income to produce more quilts or to perform other community outreach activities. Their participation has earned them increased respect in their families and communities, and has provided a way for women to gain greater levels of financial independence.

## Results

The impact generated by the implementation of the Love Quilts Program has been measured through three key indicators measured annually through surveys and focus groups with the participants: i) Number of women who

participate in community training processes of the Foundation Acesco Regional Atlántico; ii) Number of women who become involved in the United for Malambo Community Network, and iii) participation and incidence levels of women in their family and community life. Currently, 40% of the women participating in this initiative have become active leaders in their community.

Since its implementation, the participation of women in the training processes promoted by the Acesco Foundation has increased steadily in the Malambo municipality. Furthermore, a greater degree of self-confidence and assertiveness has been observed among participants, resulting in higher levels of participation in the different spaces or areas of participation (e.g. Community Action Councils) and in the interaction with government authorities and companies at the local and departmental levels. In these fora, they present challenges facing them as individuals and as a community, and they are able to propose possible solutions. Based on the different testimonies given in the focus groups and workshops, a significant number of women have been capable of reducing the different forms of violence and inequality within their homes.

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The Regional Contest: "Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean" organized by the World Bank, proposes to discover, document and share innovative, effective and sustainable initiatives that address key gender challenges within the region in the target areas of (i) Teenage Pregnancy, (ii) Gender-based violence and (iii) Women's participation in decision-making. The following initiative is one of the finalists of its category, among more than 150 initiatives received from 16 countries. This initiative is supported by the World Bank Group's Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality, a multi-donor facility designed to strengthen awareness, knowledge, and capacity for gender-informed policy making.



# PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

## PARTICIPATORY BUDGET FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

### Metropolitan Municipality of Lima, Peru

**HONOURABLE MENTION – Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Participatory Budget for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men initiative was launched in 2013 with the objective of guaranteeing women the necessary space to fully participate in budgetary decision-making in the Metropolitan Municipality of Lima through the proposal of public investment projects that intend to bridge or to eliminate gender gaps.

#### The Problem

The participation of women in public spaces in the Lima Metropolitan Area has been extremely low, especially in decision-making spaces and budget-setting processing. Historically, the team responsible for participatory budgeting has been led and comprised by men, and projects proposed did not include a gender perspective.

#### Approach of the Initiative

The initiative consists mainly of two actions: i) Incorporation of the gender approach as a prioritization criterion within the evaluation of local projects, and ii) creation of a special subprocess that allocates financing to projects that aim to eliminate or bridge gender gaps and in which women are the central protagonists.

The realization of the special participatory budget for women follows the guidelines of

public policies that seek to bridge the gaps derived from gender-based inequality, making it possible for the citizens of Lima to decide together with local authorities how to make better use of public resources. Sensitization campaigns and training workshops sought to educate women's organizations on the updated local budget process; and training workshops strengthened local capacities to develop, propose and implement projects that contribute to gender equality.

#### Challenges and Lessons Learned

- **Duration and effectiveness of the trainings for women agents:** Ongoing capacity building is necessary to equip women on governmental procedures in which they are participating for the first time. Unconditional support of professional specialists in social projects has been essential for adequate and effective education of women in the organized trainings.

The Women's Office of the Metropolitan Municipality of Lima is the agency responsible for the promotion and protection of the rights of women and of the supervision of compliance with the standards of equality between men and women, promoting the incorporation of the gender perspective in a cross-cutting manner in all the policies and interventions of the Municipality.



**Municipalidad Metropolitana de Lima**

[www.munlima.gob.pe/gerencia-de-la-mujer](http://www.munlima.gob.pe/gerencia-de-la-mujer)



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## Observations of evaluators and collaborating agencies

“The existence of a fund to specifically promote the participation of women that includes women’s organizations and a more equitable redistribution of the budget makes it an innovative system in Peru.”

“At the national level, the experience of Lima has been presented as an example of good practice in the advancement of the participatory process of women so that other subnational governments may replicate the model of the initiative.”

“The development of capabilities of women as participating agents and as members of the technical teams of the municipal government has been fundamental in learning how to incorporate gender criteria contributed by the women themselves.”

- Advise the participating organizations on the importance of emphasizing in their projects the impact on the community and not the benefit for the organizations themselves: This has been improved through informative workshops that communicate the importance of citizen participation in the participatory budgets at the national level.

- **Effective management of project reception:** A unit needs to be created within the Women’s Office to facilitate effective channeling and selection of the projects received.

## Results

Women’s participation in participatory budget processes has had great impact in Lima. Women, for the first time, are active citizens exercising their rights, taking on roles traditionally assigned to men, and freely expressing their opinions and viewpoints in public decision-making spaces. The three main results of this initiative are: 1) active participation of women’s organizations and individual women in budgetary decision-making public spaces; 2) specific budget allocations to finance projects aimed at reducing gender gaps between men and women; and 3) a variety of local projects that are sensitive to the needs of women, girls, and adolescents.



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# PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING COMMUNITY OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS TRAINING PROGRAM

CRIAR-Community of Female Entrepreneurs, Argentina

**FINALIST – Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Community of Female Entrepreneurs was launched in 2012 in Rosario, Argentina, in order to promote greater participation of women in the productive and social sectors. The initiative includes a training program and other professional and personal development opportunities to support female entrepreneurs in their work.

## The Problem

Women tend to begin the enterprise intuitively, but often face inadequate professional training in topics such as profitability, growth, and scalability. Specifically, women in the city of Rosario seem to face additional barriers to successful entrepreneurship and lack strong support networks.

## Approach of the Initiative

The initiative addresses the problem in two stages:

First stage:

- **Training program for Entrepreneurial Women:** Six intensive training modules on enterprise development in areas such as leadership or marketing, among others.
- **Mentor Workshops:** One-day training and advisory workshops with mentors on specific areas: Fashion, Gastronomy, and Technology.

- **Seminars and events:** Seminars address social and professional topics such as family, work, equity, project development, and impact on society.

- **Opportunities for collaboration:** Relationships and support networks are generated to provide visibility to their projects.

In the second stage, CRIAR plans to invest in a physical location within the community where women can work and collaborate on projects, seek advisory services, and hold gatherings and meetings. The initiative intends to create a virtual forum to provide on-line training to those entrepreneurial women who live far from the training center.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Secure the participation of entrepreneurial women in the training program: Female entrepreneurs are busy women, and many juggle the responsibilities of work and family.

CRIAR is a women's organization whose mission is to provide educational and development tools to women in the city of Rosario and the region in order to optimize personal and professional resources, and to successfully develop their careers and the social and commercial projects they lead.



[www.emprendedorascriar.org](http://www.emprendedorascriar.org)





The initiative sought entrepreneur participation through a virtual community, newsletters, and secured their participation through the unconditional support of the team of instructors and project coordinators.

**Limited development and use of planning tools in enterprising activities:** Many CRIAR entrepreneurs work in the informal sector with scant skills with respect to planning, financing, legal and productive tools, limited experience in the use of information technology, and restricted social and business networks. The technical and operational aspects of the program that expanded entrepreneurial knowledge and networks were most successful. More work remains to be done to optimize a virtual education platform.

### Observations of evaluators and collaborating agencies

“We believe that empowerment through training and the growth of the initiatives themselves are the key elements offered by CRIAR, which has had an astonishing impact on the women who make up the community and those that participate from its proposals.”

“CRIAR fills a space that was vacant in our city. It is a place for Entrepreneurial Women where the exchange of ideas and the promotion of activities foster the personal and professional development of each woman that participates.”


“The initiative designed by and for women includes fundamental aspects in our society such as support for gender-related issues, decision-making, and the joint vision of increasing the participation of women in the economic and social sectors, thus promoting their independence.”

### Results

To date, the main results that should be highlighted are:

- 110 entrepreneurial women trained through the program trainings, workshops, and seminars.
- 395 entrepreneurial women have participated in the virtual network.
- 60% increase in on-line and in-person consultations in one year.

The CRIAR Community project has not yet completed measurement parameters of its outcomes; however, in 2015, with the support of local public agencies, it plans to document its impact together with CRIAR participants and the local female entrepreneurial community.

 [www.facebook.com/EmprendedorasCRIAR](http://www.facebook.com/EmprendedorasCRIAR)

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## PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

# WOMEN CREATING SCENARIOS OF PEACE AND COEXISTENCE

International Law and Society Corporation, Colombia

**FINALIST – Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Women Creating Scenarios of Peace and Coexistence initiative was launched in 2010 in order to support and train female victims of the internal armed conflict in the municipalities of San Juan de Arama and Vistahermosa, in the Department del Meta, Colombia. The initiative provides them with tools critical to economic autonomy and the participation in local decision-making processes in their communities and municipalities.

### **The Problem**

The municipalities in which the initiative is implemented suffered various forms of violence at the hands of armed groups; and many in the community who have been victimized require psychosocial and legal support.

Furthermore, in these municipalities, there has traditionally been an absence of women participating in decision-making processes in local budget allocations and the formation of public policies. After the approval of the Victims' Law of 2011 and of the peace talks with the FARC guerrilla forces, many women have expressed their desire to participate in municipal-level decisions.

### **Approach of the Initiative**

This initiative is an attempt to amplify the voices of local women, and to support their ideas and projects for local development and reconciliation. Additionally, this initiative seeks to empower women to create and fulfil the life plans they have for themselves and for their communities during a critical time of reconstruction and transition to peace.

The strategy proposed to achieve the main objectives of the initiative contains the following programs and activities:

- The creation of an emotional support network for the reconstruction of life plans, led by women, with occasional support from experts when required.
- Resource management that enables ongoing projects to be expanded to other women who wish to participate in these initiatives.
- Creation of a diploma program in Design, Management, Administration and Evaluation, which increasing the abilities and competencies of women in the areas of public speaking, management negotiation, program design, budgeting, and participatory monitoring of public policies.
- Provision of conflict resolution assistance through mediation or conciliation with the support of women leaders to convene and promote community participation.

International Law and Society Corporation is an community-based organization made up of a team of professionals whose principal objectives are to provide advisory services, legal counsel, and empowerment to individuals and legal entities in all the branches of Law. Furthermore, it also provides training services to communities and entities related to social problems and the guarantee of legal rights.



[www.ciderechoysociedad.org](http://www.ciderechoysociedad.org)

## Observations of evaluators and collaborating agencies

“The fact that they have seen us as women with rights and with the capacity and sufficient abilities to develop proposals from the perspective of our needs has been a very important aspect of this initiative.”

“Thanks to this initiative we can have access to educational opportunities aimed at a culture of peace and local development, as a comprehensive alternative to overcome our condition as women victims of the armed conflict and to participate in any decision-making space.”

“The initiative was very well received especially by the communities where the Corporation has a high level of credibility and personnel highly committed to the cause.”

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

- **Emotional condition of women:** In many cases, psychosocial factors inhibited female participation and limited women’s access to social networks. To this end, entities and support groups were mobilized to help participants in critical situations and to encourage continued local engagement.
- **Limited schooling of women:** Low levels of education discouraged women from participating in trainings. The initiative began offering support to women who desired to complete primary and secondary education.
- **Excessive presence of entities in the area:** Women whose voices and experiences have routinely been excluded from local decision-making processes face disillusionment with local government and external donors. The Corporation responds directly to local requests for professional support in order to avoid donor dependency and to encourage local ownership of initiatives.

## Results

To date, the Initiative has facilitated the development of a support network of female leaders, an autonomous meeting space, and independent of the support of municipal or departmental governments or of nongovernmental organizations.

More than 300 women and their families are beneficiaries of this initiative. Some of the women’s organizations that have participated in the processes are: Fundación Enseñame a Volar, Network of Women of the Macarena, Rural Women’s Association, Association of Displaced Women from the Macarena and Association of Women of African Descent of the Macarena. Average membership in these organizations is approximately 60 women.

The initiative has a series of indicators to measure results. They include: number of projects designed, managed, administered, and evaluated by the participating female leaders; number of women participating in the Diploma program and number of graduated women; number of women leaders who are part of the civil service as appointed public servants or as officials elected by popular vote (Councilwomen, Representatives, Mayors).



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# PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

## CAMINAS

Plan International, Bolivia

**FINALIST – Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The CAMINAS initiative was launched in 2011 with the objective of achieving equitable access, control and benefit of local water resources between women and men. It advocates for the recognition of the role of women in water supply, the appreciation of how their role benefits families, and the inclusion of women in community organizations that manage water resources.

### The Problem

Water management in the rural communities of Chuquisaca, Cochabamba, and Potosí, Bolivia involves many activities pertinent to the availability, access, and distribution of water within the community. However, women tend to be excluded or invisible in decision-making within their communities relative to the availability, access and distribution of water. Drinking Water and Sanitation Committees (CAPyS) and other community organizations, such as unions, are often patriarchal organizational structures whose decision-making power is performed mainly by men, and exclude the knowledge and needs of women.

### Approach of the Initiative

The project has carried out a series of activities to achieve each of the proposed objectives:

**Equitable and quality access to water resources and its benefits:** Optimal systems were set up for safe household water that made it possible to reduce the workload of women in water collection as well as a reduction of water-born illnesses, such as diarrhea.

**Development of capabilities for men and women in the community:** Women were provided with theoretical and methodological tools to find effective solutions to the problems identified regarding water access and management. These training processes were developed through the use of affirmative action measures, establishing convenient schedules for women, the use of participatory methodologies, and sensitization processes aimed at men so that they appreciate and recognize the important role played by women, their workload, and their capabilities.

**Capacity strengthening of local actors (municipal authorities, community organizations, and technicians):** Continuous training processes were developed so that sensitized actors (with knowledge of gender-related issues, the participation of women and their unique demand and use of water) can continue to carry out the actions undertaken by the project in an adequate manner.

**Support and promotion of equity relationships between men and women at the decision-making level of the CAPyS:** Education relating to national and international regulatory

Plan International is a development organization that works to promote child rights and eradicate poverty affecting boys and girls in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In Bolivia, Plan operates in more than 1,000 communities of 51 municipalities suffering extreme poverty and low levels of human development. Plan works to promote gender equality through mainstreaming gender in its projects and programs.



[www.plan-international.org](http://www.plan-international.org)





### Observations of evaluators and collaborating agencies

“The possibilities of replicating this initiative are great, because there is a committee that works on water management in practically each Bolivian community, and it is a space where the voice of women is usually ignored.”

“Water is life and thanks to this initiative it is more easily available, especially for the women and children of these communities since they are the ones who go to the rivers and other remote places to fetch water.”

“This initiative is not only helping to change the vision on the role women play in the areas of water, nutrition, health, etc., but it has also contributed to reduce poverty for these women and the communities where they live.”

frameworks that mandate women’s inclusion helped promote the participation of women and their incorporation into the statutes and by-laws of the CAPyS.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

#### Empowerment and visibility of women:

As women learned of their rights to participate equally, they began to actively exercise their rights as full-fledge citizens. To this end, it was necessary to create a climate of equality between the sexes and to strengthen the culture of participation that gives women a sense of identity and self-esteem along with the value of collective work.

#### Achieve a more equitable and inclusive participation:

The application of national and international regulations in instruments and community organizational structures has allowed a more equitable, effective and sustainable participation. The organization of community workshops and trainings, the dissemination of case studies and videos, among others actions, also helped achieve the participatory, gender-sensitive approach proposed by the project.

**Governance:** Access to information for both men and women enables both to be better informed, to have access to decision-making mechanisms, and to better manage water and sanitation services and other development projects. In addition, these acquired capabilities encourage forging closer ties between the local government, women, and men that enable both to fully exercise their citizenship.

**Quantitative and qualitative monitoring with gender approach:** Indicators with a gender perspective that involve men and women in the monitoring and evaluation process have been included, not as informants but as participants, which generate a better understanding of whom has benefited in the community.

### Results

To date, the initiative has benefited 108,802 people of which 60% are women from rural communities. Currently, women represent 48% in decision-making levels of their water organizations. Furthermore, 20% of women who participate in the CAPyS are presidents of the organization, 30% hold the second position, and the rest of the women perform as treasurers or as members. Ultimately, the operation of the water system is improving thanks to the strengthening of the CAPyS and to the more equitable participation of men and women in the management of the water committees. Finally, although the results are not conclusive, practice has shown that the CAPyS managed by women are more efficient than those managed by men, because whenever there is a failure in the system women tend to repair it with more urgency.



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